Theodoric II

(c. 453 – Early 466)

BRIEFING

Theodoric II (c. 426 – early 466) was the eighth King of the Visigoths, from 453 to 466.

BIOGRAPHY

Theoderic II, son of Theodoric I, obtained the throne by killing his elder brother Thorismund. The English historian Edward Gibbon writes that "he justified this atrocious deed by the design which his predecessor had formed of violating his alliance with the empire." In late 458 the Western Roman Emperor, Majorian entered Septimania to attack Theodoric and reclaim the province for the empire. Majorian defeated Theodoric at the Battle of Arelate, forcing the Visigoths to abandon Septimania and withdraw west to Aquitania. Under the new treaty with the Romans, the Visigoths had to relinquish their recent conquests in Hispania and return to federate status. However, after the assassination of Majorian in 461, Theodoric recaptured Septimania and invaded Hispania again. Theodoric sided with Ricimer and the new emperor Libius Severus against Majorian's magister militum per Gallias Aegidius. Theodorics' army was defeated by Aegidius at Aurelianum and his brother Frederic died in battle, which Kulikowski writes "would have important consequences for the Gothic succession." Theodoric was himself murdered in 466 by his younger brother Euric, who succeeded him to the throne.

GOTHIC WAR IN SPAIN

The Gothic War in Spain of 456 was a military operation of the Visigoths commissioned by the West Roman emperor Avitus.[2] This operation consisted of an extensive campaign aimed at reclaiming the Spanish provinces of Lusitania and Betica that were in the hands of the Suebi and threatened Roman power in the provinces of Cartaginensis and Tarraconensis. The main players in this war were Theoderic II who led the army of the Visigoths and Rechiar the king of the Suebi. The Visigothic army was supported by Franks and Burgundian auxiliary troops.

The story of this war is briefly reported by the Spanish bishop Hydatius who was an eyewitness to the looting of the city Braga by the Visigoths. In addition Sidonius Apollinaris the son-in-law of Emperor Avitus, whom Theodoric knew personally, is also a useful source for information. Other early source is Jordanes who wrote a history about the Goths in the sixth century.

The Suebi arrived in 409 in Spain where they have since stayed in the poor and mountainous Gallaecia. Initially, they were not a threat to the Romans. Compared to the Visigoths and Vandals, they only brought small war gangs on their feet. In contrast, they were never part of the Roman covenant policy, so that they behaved differently from the *foederati* in Gaul who served as garrison soldiers and were under the supervision of the Roman army. Emperor Honorius did not think it was necessary at the time that the military campaign of Wallia from 415 to 418 was also directed against the Seubi. Nevertheless, there was a lack of a strong imperial army in northwestern Spain to offer sufficient counterweight, usually the inhabitants had to defend themselves.

Under King Hermeric (409–438) the Sueve mainly stayed in Gallaecia. His successor Rechila (438–448), on the other hand, pursued a very warlike policy aimed at territorial expansion. From Gallaecia he led several campaigns against the Romans in the nearby Hispania Baetica and Hispania Lusitania. Rechila defeated the Vandal captain Andevotus in 438, who was possibly in Roman service. He then conquered the provincial capital Mérida (439) of *Lusitania*. This gave him his hands on this entire province. Two years later he repeated this trick by conquering the city of Sevilla (441) in the adjacent *Baetica'.*

With the provincial capitals in their hands, Rechila put an end to Roman rule. The Imperial Army was too weak to expel him. Taking advantage of the situation, Richila now also set his arrows on *Carthaginensis*. His wargangs penetrated deep into this province. A Roman attempt to drive them back stranded in 446. General Vitus' army, which was reinforced with Gothic auxiliary troops, suffered a great defeat, after which the Suebi were free rein and were able to wread great devastation. Only the presence of the Visigoths in the north prevented them from also getting their hands on Tarraconesis and thus the whole of Spain.

In 448 Rechila was succeeded by his son Rechiar who was at least as warlike. At the beginning of his reign, he had the *comes Hispanae* Censorius, who was imprisoned in Seville, murdered. He plundered the Ebro Valley and sought rapprochement with the Bagaudae who were active here. Later in 449 he went on a diplomatic mission to Toulouse, where Theodoric I, his father-in-law and Roman ally sat. On his return journey, Rechiar made an alliance with Basilius, the leader of the Bagaudae, and again went through the Ebro Valley, where he attacked Caesareas Augusta and took the city Lleida. He took many prisoners, but failed to take the province and thus complete the Suevi conquest of Spain.

In 452–453, the commander-in-chief of the Roman army Aëtius sent a delegation to the court of Rechiar to talk about peace. This delegation consisted of the military counts Mansuetus and Fronto. They concluded an agreement in which conditions were imposed over and over again. Rechiar renounced the province of Carthaginensis.

After the murder of Aetius and the emperors Valentinian III and Petronius Maximus in 455, Rechiar no longer felt bound by this and resumed his attempt to conquer all of Spain on the Romans. According to Jordanes, based on his relationship with the Visigothic king and Roman foederatus Theodoric II (his brother-in-law), he had 'the suspicion' that he could rule all over Hispania.

In Toulouse, Avitus, the commander-in-chief of the Gallic field army, was declared new emperor in 455. This emperor had very good contacts at the Visigothic court, where a change of power had recently taken place. He maintained a friendly relationship with Theodoric II, the new king who was very Roman. Avitus inherited an empire that was threatened on multiple fronts. In addition to the Mediterranean area that was made unsafe by Vandal pirates, the new emperor received messages from the Spanish provinces that were very disturbing. Rechiar had meanwhile conquered the city Cartagena (Spain), taking control of the province of Carthaginensis and had started the conquest of Tarraconensis. However, if Jordanes information is correct, Rechiar made a colossal mistake, for Theodoric had his friendship with the emperor pre-laved over the family bond with Rechiar. Together with the emperor, the Gothic leader prepared a military operation to completely recapture Spain and put an end to the Suevi domination once and for all. Theodoric was given the important task of leading this army.

While Avitus travelled to Italy to monetize his claim to the title of emperor there, Theodoric marched with a large army of *foederati* towards Spain to restore Roman rule. The army that was leaving consisted of Burgundian and Frankish auxiliary troops in addition to a main force of Visigoths. Once in Tarraconensis Roman units also joined Theoderic. Data on the size of this army is missing. According to Thompson, the Sueven had an estimated 6,000 warriors, a real number compared to other groups from that period, and additionally reinforced with *Bagaudae*, which Rechiar had hired as mercenaries. The army that Theodorik led was at least equal to or larger than that of the Suebi.

The Battle of Órbigo

The Battle of Órbigo, also known as the Battle of the Urbicus and the Battle of Campus Paramus took place in 456 when the Visigoths of Theodoric II defeated the Suevi Kingdom and sacked their capital Braga. Although very little is known of the battle the defeat proved a significant blow to the Suevi who would enter a period of decline afterwards and would never fully recover their territory.

The Suevi King Rechiar had been expanding his territory at the expense of the Romans in Hispania, who were unable stop them. The Roman Emperor Avitus requested his allies the Visigoths of Theodoric II and the Burgundians of Gondiloc and Chilperic to attack the Suebi for him. Theodoric agreed and invaded Spain with his army.

Theodoric's campaign went well. The combined army moved towards Galicia and encountered little opposition along the way. Rechiar had deployed his army on the River Urbicus (Órbigo), close to the city Astorga. On 5 October 456, Theodoric defeated Rechiar here in a battle on the *Campus Paramus*, twelve miles from the city Astorga. Rechiar was injured during the battle, but according to Hydatius he managed to flee to Portuscale (today Porto) in the heart of his kingdom. There he was eventually defeated and captured. Theodoric then conquered Bracara Augusta (Braga), the capital of the Suebi. According to tradition, things went rough and Theodoric's army looted several cities in Gallaecia next to Braga. Some of the Suevens were slaughtered and even holy places were attacked, probably because of the support of local clergy to the Suevens. After this, Theodoric's army controlled the Spanish provinces Hispania Baetica, Hispania Tarraconensis and South-Lusitania. The Suebi kingdom collapsed and quickly broke up into rival factions in the following years.

Aftermath

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The battle of the Urbicus was the beginning of the conquest of Spain by the Visigoths. The returned king of the Visigoths turned himself against the new Roman authority in Italy. Now that his comrade Avitus had been deposed and murdered, Theodoric set aside the treaty with the Romans at the beginning of 457 and revolted, breaking out the Gothic War of 457-458. In Spain, the Gothic garrisons were instructed to take over the power in the cities from the Romans.

GOTHIC WAR OF 457 – 458

The Gothic War of 457–458 was a military conflict between the Visigoths of Theoderic II against the Western Roman Empire of Emperor Majorian. The war began in 457 with a revolt of the Goths in Aquitania that pushed aside Roman authority, followed by an aggressive conquest in the adjacent Septimania aimed at area expansion. The war ended with a Roman victory over the Goths in the Battle of Arles in 458.

The most important contemporary sources in which this war is reported are the Gallo-Roman writer Sidonius Apollinaris (431-489) and the bishop of Chaves Hydatius (400-469). Furthermore, the *Historia Francorum (history of the Franks)* of Gregory of Tours (535-594) is an early source.

In the run-up to this war, there was a crisis situation within the Western Roman Empire. Emperor Avitus was deposed in October 456 by the rebelling generals Ricimer and Majorian and then assassinated. In the Gallic provinces, the Gallo-Roman aristocracy rebelled against this deposition and appealed to the Burgundian and Visigothic allies. The Visigothic King Theodoric II (453 - 466) was staying in Spain at that time where he campaigned against the Suebi along with the Bourgondian king Gundioc. When they reached the news of the deposition of the emperor and the revolt in Gaul, Theoderic left command to his generals Sunerik and Cyrila and returned to Toulouse, while Gundioc and his entire army returned to the mountains of Saudia.

The recently appointed emperor in the east Leo I, who was now also emperor of the west until he had appointed a successor, inherited a difficult relationship with the west from his predecessors. He was initially unwilling to cooperate with the rebellious generals, but lacked sufficient influence to impose his will on the West. In the end, the extremely unstable situation in the west asked for a solution that made him dwell on the two generals who served in Italy.

Leo appointed Ricimer as *patricius e magister militum* commander-in-chief with the title of Patrician and Majorian as *magister militum*, making Majorianus the subordinate of Ricimer. In doing so, he insulted Majorianus who, with the support of the Senate, forced Leo to appoint him to Caesar on April 1, 457. When Leo hesitated to acknowledge him, Majorian proclaimed himself emperor of the west on December 28, 457, with the support of the Senate and the army.

The Gallic aristocracy considered Majorian elevation to emperor by the Senate as usurpation and put forward their own candidate Marcellinus as successor to Avitus. To strengthen themselves against Roman power in Italy, they sought support from the Burgundians and Visigoths. A delegation representing several cities in addition to the senatorial nobility turned to Gundioc and sent an envoy to the emperor in the east. In exchange for more territory, the Burgundian king supported the Gallo-Romans and sent militias to the cities. The Visigothic king Theodoric also lined up behind the insurgents.

Majorian's Reconquests Campaigns

The interregnum lasted months after the death of Avitus. Most of the Gallic cities and aristocracy were turned away from Italy, and Generals Ricimer and Majorian were unsure what to do now. Taking advantage of the situation, Theoderic saw opportunities to found his own state on Roman soil. In the course of 457 he put aside the treaty with the Romans and rebelled, with which the war began. In Aquitaine he drew all power towards him and ordered his brother Frederik to conquer the adjacent region Septimania. The answer to this from the formal authority in Italy was long overdue. An invasion of northern Italy by the Alemanni and the southern Vandals caused Ricimer and Majorian to focus their attention on other matters than the Visigoths in Gaul. Yet they had a windfall with the imperial army in Gaul which was partly under the command of Aegidius, a general who declared himself loyal to Majorian. With this they still had a card in their hands that would soon be deployed.

The advance of the Goths in the south continued reprehensively now that they encountered no opposition. Frederick conquered Septimania and Theodoric II seized Narbonne which gave the Goths access to the Mediterranean. This port city fell into his hands without gun violence thanks to the betrayal of the Roman general Agrippinus who, unlike Aegidius, had turned away from Majorian. According to Mathisens, he belonged to the Gallic insurgents who had turned to the Burgundians. Nevertheless, after the conquest of Septimania, the Visigoths clashed with the Gallic field army led by Aegidus. Majorianus had appointed him *magister militum per Gallias*, replacing Agrippinus, [8] and given the order to put things in order in Gaul. At Arles, the Visigoths clashed with the Romans, with Aegidius being cut short. After his defeat, he withdrew from the south.

Recimer and Majorian could not send reinforcements now that they themselves were confronted with external incursions in Italy. From Raetia, the Alemanni penetrated Italian territory as far as Lake Maggiore. There they were intercepted and defeated by the troops of comes Burco, sent by Majorian to stop them. A group of Vandals landed in Campania in the summer of 457, at the mouth of the Garigliano River, and began to destroy and plunder the region. Majorian personally led the Roman army to a victory over the invaders at Sinuessa killing many of them.

Only after consolidating his position in Italy could Majorian concentrate on restoring power in Gaul. Before that, he first had to strengthen the Roman army. Unlike under Aetius, at this stage the Roman army no longer had the manpower and logistics to maintain itself as before. Majorianus recruited barbarians en masse to bring the army to strength. Some of these were Huns under a certain Tuldila, who came from a group that settled on the Danube during the collapse of Attila's empire. Others were Rugi, Gepids, Heruli and Goths from Noricum and Pannonia, and it is likely that Majorianus agreed to formally recognize the territory and income they controlled in exchange for their military services. He may also have withdrawn some of the remaining Pannonian Limitanei Be that as it may, from the military commander of Dalmatia Marcellinus he received support consisting of supplying troops and fleet units.

With his new federated troops, Majorian had assembled a force of as many as 10,000 men. He appointed Nepotianus as his second general in rank behind Ricimer and then marched across the Alps towards Gaul. Here Aegidius's army joined him, who had meanwhile strengthened with Frankish auxiliary troops, and their army now amounted to 20,000 men, with which the Roman army was considerably stronger than the armed forces that Theodoric could oppose.

With the bulk of his army, supplemented by loyal foederati and accompanied by his generals Aegidius and Nepotianus, Majorian marched in 458 against the Gallic insurgents who had united with the Burgundians of Gundioc. They entered the Rhone Valley and defeated the Burgundians even before they could have retreated into Lugdunum. Then it was the turn of the rebellious Gallic cities in the south, which surrendered one by one to Majorian.

After this, the Romans marched against the Visigoths of Theoderic and his army, who were besieging Aegidius at Arelate (now Arles), at the mouth of the river Rhodanus (Rhône). The resulting battle was an overwhelming defeat for the Goths. The Roman army was supreme in battle and won the battle. The defeated Visigoths fled after the defeat and King Theodoric II narrowly escaped death.

The Battle of Arelate

The Battle of Arles was fought in 456 near Arelate (Arles) betweem Western Emperor Majorian and Visigothic king Theodoric II. After the assassination of Flavius Aetius in 454, the Visigoths began to expand their kingdom at the expense of the crumbling Roman administration in Gaul and Hispania. When Majorian became emperor in 457, the Visigoths under king Theodoric II had just recently defeated the Suebic Kingdom in north-west Hispania and were consolidating their hold on the rest of the Iberian Peninsula.

Majorian, a young, capable general in his late thirties, inherited a collapsing empire consisting of only Italy, Dalmatia, and some fractured territories in northern Gaul. He decided the first step towards consolidating the empire would be to confront the Visigoths in Septimania. Traveling with his generals Aegidius and Nepotianus, Majorian encountered the Visigothic king and his army at Arelate, at the mouth of the Rhodanus River (Rhone). The ensuing battle was an overwhelming Gothic defeat. Theodoric II was forced to flee Arelate, abandon Septimania, and conclude a hasty peace treaty. The treaty returned all Visigothic territory in Hispania to the Romans, and the Visigoths were reduced to federate status.

The battle allowed Majorian to campaign deeper in Gaul against the Burgundian Kingdom, and later in Hispania against the Suebic Kingdom.

The Visigothic army fled to Toulouse where they were enclosed by the Roman army. After a brief siege, the king surrendered and peace talks began. In the peace that Majorian forced the Visigoths, they had to give up their settlements in Spain and Gaul and return within the limits of their settlement area in Aquitaine according to the original foederati treaty with the Romans from 418. With the help of his new *foederati*, Majorian entered the Rhone Valley, conquering its populations "some by arms and some by diplomacy". He defeated the Burgundians and besieged and conquered the city of Lugdunum: the rebel city was heavily fined, while the Bagaudae were forced to join the Empire. Despite the fact that the Gallo-Roman aristocracy had sided with Avitus, Majorian wanted a reconciliation, not a punishment. With the intercession of Majorian's *magister epistolarum* Petrus, Sidonius Apollinaris, the son-in-law of Avitus, was allowed to deliver a panegyric in honour of the Emperor (early January 459), receiving in reward the appointment to the rank of *comes spectabilis*. Much more effective was, however, the granting of the tax remission that the citizens of Lugdunum had requested from Leo I.

DESCRIPTION BY A ROMAN

The Gallo-Roman Sidonius Apollinaris wrote a famously vivid and gushing letter to his brother-in-law Agricola describing the king Theodoric II and his court. The letter reads as follows:

You have often begged a description of Theodoric the Gothic king, whose gentle breeding fame commends to every nation; you want him in his quantity and quality, in his person, and the manner of his existence. I gladly accede, as far as the limits of my page allow, and highly approve so fine and ingenuous a curiosity.

Well, he is a man worth knowing, even by those who cannot enjoy his close acquaintance, so happily have Providence and Nature joined to endow him with the perfect gifts of fortune; his way of life is such that not even the envy which lies in wait for kings can rob him of his proper praise. And first as to his person. He is well set up, in height above the average man, but below the giant. His head is round, with curled hair retreating somewhat from brow to crown. His nervous neck is free from disfiguring knots. The eyebrows are bushy and arched; when the lids droop, the lashes reach almost half-way down the cheeks. The upper ears are buried under overlying locks, after the fashion of his race. The nose is finely aquiline; the lips are thin and not enlarged by undue distension of the mouth. Every day the hair springing from his nostrils is cut back; that on the face springs thick from the hollow of the temples, but the razor has not yet come upon his cheek, and his barber is assiduous in eradicating the rich growth on the lower part of the face. Chin, throat, and neck are full, but not fat, and all of fair complexion; seen close, their colour is fresh as that of youth; they often flush, but from modesty, and not from anger. His shoulders are smooth, the upper- and forearms strong and hard; hands broad, breast prominent; waist receding. The spine dividing the broad expanse of back does not project, and you can see the springing of the ribs; the sides swell with salient muscle, the well-girt flanks are full of vigour. His thighs are like hard horn; the knee-joints firm and masculine; the knees themselves the comeliest and least wrinkled in the world. A full ankle supports the leg, and the foot is small to bear such mighty limbs.

Now for the routine of his public life. Before daybreak he goes with a very small suite to attend the service of his priests. He prays with assiduity, but, if I may speak in confidence, one may suspect more of habit than conviction in this piety. Administrative duties of the kingdom take up the rest of the morning. Armed nobles stand about the royal seat; the mass of guards in their garb of skins are admitted that they may be within call, but kept at the threshold for quiet's sake; only a murmur of them comes in from their post at the doors, between the curtain and the outer barrier.1 And now the foreign envoys are introduced. The king hears them out, and says little; if a thing needs more discussion he puts it off, but accelerates matters ripe for dispatch. The second hour arrives; he rises from the throne to inspect his treasure-chamber or stable.

If the chase is the order of the day, he joins it, but never carries his bow at his side, considering this derogatory to royal state. When a bird or beast is marked for him, or happens to cross his path, he puts his hand behind his back and takes the bow from a page with the string all hanging loose; for as he deems it a boy's trick to bear it in a quiver, so he holds it effeminate to receive the weapon ready strung. When it is given him, he sometimes holds it in both hands and bends the extremities towards each other; at others he sets it, knot-end downward, against his lifted heel, and runs his finger up the slack and wavering string. After that, he takes his arrows, adjusts, and lets fly. He will ask you beforehand what you would like him to transfix; you choose, and he hits. If there is a miss through either's error, your vision will mostly be at fault, and not the archer's skill.

On ordinary days, his table resembles that of a private person. The board does not groan beneath a mass of dull and unpolished silver set on by panting servitors; the weight lies rather in the conversation than in the plate; there is either sensible talk or none. The hangings and draperies used on these occasions are sometimes of purple silk, sometimes only of linen; art, not costliness, commends the fare, as spotlessness rather than bulk the silver. Toasts are few, and you will oftener see a thirsty guest impatient, than a full one refusing cup or bowl. In short, you will find elegance of Greece, good cheer of Gaul, Italian nimbleness, the state of public banquets with the attentive service of a private table, and everywhere the discipline of a king's house. What need for me to describe the pomp of his feast days? No man is so unknown as not to know of them. But to my theme again. The siesta after dinner is always slight, and sometimes intermitted. When inclined for the board-game,1 he is quick to gather up the dice, examines them with care, shakes the box with expert hand, throws rapidly, humorously apostrophizes them, and patiently waits the issue. Silent at a good throw, he makes merry over a bad, annoyed by neither fortune, and always the philosopher. He is too proud to ask or to refuse a revenge; he disdains to avail himself of one if offered; and if it is opposed will quietly go on playing. You effect recovery of your men without obstruction on his side; he recovers his without collusion upon yours. You see the strategist when he moves the pieces; his one thought is victory. Yet at play he puts off a little of his kingly rigour, inciting all to good fellowship and the freedom of the game: I think he is afraid of being feared. Vexation in the man whom he beats delights him; he will never believe that his opponents have not let him win unless their annoyance proves him really victor. You would be surprised how often the pleasure born of these little happenings may favour the march of great affairs. Petitions that some wrecked influence had left derelict come unexpectedly to port; I myself am gladly beaten by him when I have a favour to ask, since the loss of my game may mean the gaining of my cause. About the ninth hour, the burden of government begins again. Back come the importunates, back the ushers to remove them; on all sides buzz the voices of petitioners, a sound which lasts till evening, and does not diminish till interrupted by the royal repast; even then they only disperse to attend their various patrons among the courtiers, and are astir till bedtime. Sometimes, though this is rare, supper is enlivened by sallies of mimes, but no guest is ever exposed to the wound of a biting tongue. Withal there is no noise of hydraulic organ,1 or choir with its conductor intoning a set piece; you will hear no players of lyre or flute, no master of the music, no girls with cithara or tabor; the king cares for no strains but those which no less charm the mind with virtue than the ear with melody. When he rises to withdraw, the treasury watch begins its vigil; armed sentries stand on guard during the first hours of slumber. But I am wandering from my subject. I never promised a whole chapter on the kingdom, but a few words about the king. I must stay my pen; you asked for nothing more than one or two facts about the person and the tastes of Theodoric; and my own aim was to write a letter, not a history. Farewell.

—Sidonius Apollinaris, Epistulae Bk.II

This description was later largely copied by the German chronicler Rahewin when describing Frederick Barbarossa in the 12th century.